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CHOICES

As a Basis for Analysis of Farm People's Problems

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Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics

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AS A BASIS FOR ANALYSIS OF FARM PEOPLE'S PROBLEMS

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Extension Economist

F O R E W O R D

Mr. C. H. Schopmeyer, Senior Agriculturist, Office of Cooperative Extension Work, through cooperation with the Federal Board for Vocational Education improved the method for teaching the managerial phases of agricultural operations by setting up the decisions involved in the various phases of farming as a teaching basis. The effectiveness of the teaching of vocational agriculture has been greatly facilitated by his analysis of the corn and cotton enterprises and farm management.

In developing, "An Analysis of the Managerial Responsibilities of the Farm Home Maker," Mr. Schopmeyer carried out the managerial idea by setting up alternatives in optional situations confronting an individual home maker. In this analysis she is directed to a careful consideration of the determinant elements in a given case that she may become enabled to choose wisely among the different alternatives before her.

Mr. Engene Merritt has applied the same concept to the organizing of facts as a background for the farm and home economics conferences. These conferences are a device to help the farm people study their problems and work out satisfactory solutions. The solutions proposed become the basis of an extension program.

The attached paper is an attempt to present this viewpoint of the managerial aspects of farming and home making through the idea of making choices. It is believed that it will be of interest to extension workers.

C. B. Smith, Chief,
Office of Cooperative Extension Work.

DISTRIBUTION: A copy of this circular has been sent to each State and assistant State extension director, State county agent, home demonstration, and club leader, State agricultural college library, and experiment station library.

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More and more it is realized that the most successful extension workers are those who have unusual ability at diagnosing local problems as well as making effective use of various extension devices in bringing about acceptable solutions to these problems. The ability to diagnose seems to be based not only upon skill in application of subject matter to local situations but in determining why the farm people act as they do. Action is the result of conscious or unconscious thinking and of sufficient urge or feeling of a want to lead to activity. The discussion that follows is an attempt to deal primarily with the thinking process.

FUNCTION OF THINKING IN CHOICES

The thinking in which the extension worker is primarily interested is the type employed by the farm people in making choices. Through extension work we are attempting to develop two different kinds of ability as a basis of action; skill of manipulation and skill in thinking. When we attempt to teach the farmer a better method of pruning his fruit trees, we show him how to handle his saw more effectively by the expenditure of less energy and correct method of removing the limb (motor ability), as well as to choose what limbs to remove and the type of tree toward which he should work through his pruning operations (mental ability). Similarly in connection with the culling of poultry we can teach him how to hold the hen and make the various physical tests. In addition, we can aid him in his decision as to whether he should adopt into the system of poultry management the culling of his poultry several times each year. The former involves primarily manipulative ability, the latter managerial ability. And so we might go through the entire category of farm operations and find that these types of skill would be involved in most of them.

In home making, the dressing and feeding of the young child would involve manipulative skill, whereas the planning of the wardrobe and diet of the child would involve managerial skill.

FARM PEOPLE CONTINUALLY CHOOSING

In extension work we are primarily interested in improving the ability of the farm people to manage or to make choices. When we study in detail a particular farm enterprise we find it is made up of a series of steps. In connection with each one of these steps the farmer has a number of alternatives as to what he will do. Whenever a farmer makes a choice he makes a decision. For example, whenever a farmer comes to the point of carrying on his corn enterprises where he determines what variety he will plant, he has to consider a number of alternatives, that is, whether he will use the same variety he has used in the past, the one he saw on the demonstration plat, the one his neighbors grow, or the one offered him by his seed dealer. If the demonstration were effective it would aid him in deciding what variety to grow. What we are doing in extension work is improving the ability of the farm people to choose when they arrive at these decision points in their farming and home making.

Agriculture and home making are dynamic. Farmers and home makers are constantly forced to choose. In no large area in the United States is farming carried on with the same arrangement of enterprises or with the same technique as 50 or 75 years ago. Since dairying has been a part of the agriculture of the North Atlantic Section of the United States for over 100 years an analysis of some of the changes that have taken place in dairying might show how extensive and significant these changes have been. Fifty to seventy-five years ago practically all of the cows were milked by hand. The milk was taken into the house and made into butter and cheese by the farm family. In many cases this butter was then marketed direct to the ultimate consumer. The feed used in this type of farming was raised on the farm, the power being furnished by horses also raised on the farm and fed with home-grown feeds. In many cases at the present time the cows are milked by power either coming from a gasoline engine or electric plant; the milk cooled in an electric refrigerator. It is placed on a platform where another organization takes it up and performs all of the processes from the platform to the ultimate consumer. In other words, a large proportion of the processes of converting the products of the soil through dairying into a form to be used by the ultimate consumer, have been transferred from the farm and the farm family to another plant and group of persons.

Home making also has changed. Formerly the housewife did all of her washing on a washboard; now she uses a washing machine, in many cases driven by gasoline or electric power. The past generation went courting with a horse and buggy but the present generation goes courting in an automobile, The horse was raised on the farm and its motive power was farm products, but every time the wheels of the automobile turn money is being burned up. In other words, our standards of living are changing so that we have to increase the volume of the farm business not only to attain our former standards of living but increase it still more to satisfy our rising standard.

Not only have there been changes in methods of production but in the relative importance of enterprises. Not many generations in the past Vermont and New York were important sheep-raising States; now this enterprise has practically disappeared from their farms. In riding through the eastern part of the United States stone walls can be seen in the midst of woodlands and remains of foundations of houses that once sheltered a successful farm family. All of these examples of readjustments are significant of changes that are taking place in agriculture and home making. In making these readjustments the farmer and his family are faced with many alternatives out of which they have to choose the one that appears to their greatest comparative advantage. If the extension worker is to be of the most assistance he must understand these situations and the alternatives involved and know the comparative advantages.

In making the change noted above the farmer and the home maker unconsciously meet these situations, but with a high per cent of error. It is the job of the extension workers to reduce this percentage. If an individual, whether farmer, home maker, or extension worker, is to be master of his job it must be the result of correct choosing or deciding.

SEQUENCE IN CHOOSING

Certain choices are followed by certa n sequences. If for example Rosen rye is planted the same variety wil be harvested. If smutty seed is used the resultant crop will be smutty also. If too much of the available funds for livin are spent for clothes other parts of the living will suffer accordingly.

Every enterprise has similar seri s of steps or situations where the farmer is confronted with optional situations. Using the swine enterprise for example, the first step is the choosing of the breeding animals, which involves the choice of breed, the selection of the individuals to breed, and their care. Following these come the farrowing period, the growing out of the hog, fattening for market, and finding a marketing agency. Each livestock enterprise goes through these same steps.

SEQUENCES CROP CHOICES

Similarly the first step in a crop enterprise is the selection of the seed stock. In connection with this step the farmer has to determine what variety to plant, whether to use home-grown or purchased seed, and if the latter, where to buy seed. Following this are such steps as testing seed corn, plowing, preparing the land, planting and cultivating the crop, selecting and storing the seed for the following year, shocking of corn, and the finding of a satisfactory market. In connection with each one of these steps are a number of decisions.

CORN - Steps - Choices

I. Determining acreage
   1. What land

II. Procuring seed corn
   1. What variety
   2. Seed home grown
   3. What ear selection

III. Testing the seed
   1. What tests
   2. When to test
   3. What equipment

IV. Plowing the land
   1. Spring or fall
   2. What use to make of manure
   3. When to plow
   4. What kind of plow
   5. How deep
   6. An officient days work

V. Pulverizing the land
   1. When to pulverize
   2. What implements
   3. How much

VI. Planting
   1. When
   2. How apply fertilizer
   3. Drill or check
   4. Furrow, list, or level plant
   5. What distancesand thickness
   6. What depth

VII. Cultivation
   1. What implements
   2. When first to cultivate
   3. How often
   4. How deep

VIII. Gathering seed corn
   1. What selection
   2. When
   3. How much seed

IX. Storing seed corn
   1. Where to store
   2. Whether or not to treat
   3. An efficient days work, picking and storing

X. Cutting for fodder
   1. What method
   2. When to cut
   3. How large shocks
   4. An efficient days work

XI. Husking
   1. When to begin
   2. What equipment
   3. Extra help
   4. Wages
   5. An efficient days work
   6. Storing facilities

XII. Finding a market
   1. What functions
   2. Which cooperatively
   3. Which to hire
   4. Where to sell
   5. What agency to patronize

MARKETING CHOICES

In the same way the marketing of a product passes through various stages or steps. Although a product may not pass through each one of these steps they all have to be kept constantly in mind in studying the marketing of farm crops. That is, these steps are the assembling of the product, grading and standardizing, the packing and processing, transportation, financing, and distributing, and in connection with each one of these, one or more decisions are involved. As the marketing of farm products is at present organized in most instances the farmer chooses the agency and the agency manager makes the decision involved in the marketing processes.

MARKETING CHOICES

Assembling	Transportation
Grading & Standardizing	Storing
Packing	Financing
Processing	Retailing

FARM CHOICES

However, if we consider a person who has never farmed and follow him through the steps in acquiring a farm and setting himself up in a business, we shall find his first job to be that of procuring a farm. In connection with this operation he will have to determine what type of farming he is going to follow; whether dairy, cotton, hog, or poultry farming; whether he will buy or rent and where he will look and how to proceed to procure a farm. Having procured a farm the next problem will be to determine what enterprise he is going to conduct and its extent. Having determined this he will have then reached a point in farm operations where he has to determine what seed stock he will use or the initial decision in the livestock and crop enterprises.

FARM CHOICES

I. Procuring a farm
   - What kind of farming to follow
   - Whether to buy or rent
   - What price to pay for a farm
   - Where to look for a farm to purchase
   - Buy or rent additional land
   - What rent to pay
   - Where to look for a farm to rent
   - How to proceed to rent the farm

II. Determining what enterprises to conduct
   - What crops to grow
   - What livestock to keep

III. Determining the extent of each enterprise
   - How much land to devote to each crop
   - How many animals of each class of livestock to keep

IV. Determining what farm improvements to make

HOME CHOICES

Home-making choices and decisions also follow a certain sequence. Generally they hinge upon the allotment of cash funds available for living to certain phases of home making. Since the funds available are limited, whatever assignment is made has an important bearing not only upon the phase to which assigned but upon all of the other phases. For example, if a very limited amount is assigned to food either the farm will have to produce an abundance or the food standards be sacrificed. In turn the choices made in the alloting of money to food and the extent of farm food produced will control the kind of meals that can be planned. If the garden and other enterprises are not planned to meet nutritional requirements, well-balanced meals can not be served unless funds are available to purchase the deficiencies.

If too much money out of the clothing budget is allotted to one member of the family the other members of the family will have to sacrifice their clothing standard; or if too much is allotted to the family clothing the expenditures for health, education, recreation will have to be reduced.

Some home makers have a mental picture of a well-furnished house as the dominant note in the choice of expenditures, others the education of their children, still others desire to have their children well dressed or to move in a certain social group.

HOME CHOICES

Budgeting Money for Home
- Food
- Clothing
- Improving dwelling
- Home furnishing and equipment
- Fuel, light, etc.
- Education
- Recreation and social
- Church and charity
- Health
- Personal

Food
- Sources of supply
- Standards
- What to produce
- What to buy
- Meal planning
- Preparation
- Canning
- Preserving

Clothing
- Making
- Buying
- Care

INDIVIDUAL OR HUMAN CHOICES

Thus far we have been thinking of choices and decisions as they affect crops, livestock, a farm or a home; but human beings are just as much affected by the choices they make as the farm and home enterprises and by the choices human beings make with reference to these enterprises. If we begin with the farm children as soon as they reach a stage in their development where they begin to choose, follow them through to maturity and analyze the situations, decisions, or choices they make in the different stages in their career we as extension workers will be in a much better position to help them analyze their problems and work out satisfactory solutions. The child does not choose its parents, but quickly it begins to react to environment and determine what and when it will eat, when and how much it will sleep. Although the parents as a part of the child's environment determine the activities of the child, yet the child in its choosing determines how it will meet similar situations in the future. As the child grows older it becomes more and more independent of the parents; its choices are more the result of its own initiative. The child does not come into the extension program until it reaches 10 to 12 years of age; therefore, a consideration of the situations and choices involved from this period and upwards is important from the extension worker's point of view. While the children are in school they participate in the operations of the farm and home. The skills they develop with reference to the farm and home are primarily manipulative but the skills they develop with reference to themselves, such as their food habits, rest habits, and the vigor and earnestness with which they go about their tasks are matters of individual personal

management or choosing. When the individual leaves school he is generally confronted with the problem of earning a living which involves what occupation to follow and where to locate. If the farm boy and girl decide against farming they disappear from the extension picture. If they decide upon farming as a career such problems as gaining experience in the type of farming which they intend to follow later, accumulation of necessary capital to start farming and home making, developing a credit standing, and evolving a life plan confront them. At the same time the boy and girl are deciding the kind of career they are going to follow; they are choosing a life partner. The choice depends upon (1) with whom of the opposite sex they have been associated, and (2) upon ideals that may have been set up in their minds by parents, by reading, by social contacts and experiences. Generally as soon as young farm people marry, if they have not already done so, they will rent or buy a farm. Under these conditions they are confronted with such questions as (1) what kind of a home they ultimately want to possess and how they are going to plan to gradually realize it, (2) the kind and size of farm to operate, (3) the efficiency in farming that will provide them with the things they want, (4) if they rent, a renting agreement has to be made; a farm fulfilling their requirements located and system of farming and home making started. As young couples advance in years they probably will accumulate more capital, have growing children to provide for, and aim to have their mortgage indebtedness removed by the time they are between 50 and 60 years of age. After they have passed this period they are primarily interested in enjoying the fruits of their past activities and earning what necessity may require. Not only is it important to keep the sequence of choices in mind but to realize some choices are far more important than others.

RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF CHOICES

The price paid for a farm is far more significant in the financial success or failure of the family than whether to cultivate corn or cotton on the following day. The kind of house a farm family chooses to live in has more influence on their happiness than whether they will have white or rye bread for supper on a certain day. The choice of a vocation is far more important in the career of an individual than whether he or she milks the cows or feeds the calves to-morrow.

TIMELINESS OF CHOICES

To make the right choice at the proper time in one's career is more economical than trying to correct the mistake in the future. It is easier for the bride to have her home artistically furnished by having a scheme when she first marries, than to discard and refurnish later.

The young man working as a laborer at home or on a neighbor's farm has but little opportunity to work out a system of farming and to determine the kind of animals that will be found on the farm. These opportunities come to him only when he is operating a farm on his own account. The correct choices by the young man making his first payment on a farm as to size, productivity, price, and accessibility to market may determine his success or failure as a farmer and the type of family he is to raise.

The farmer past 50 years of age with a small farm free from debt is not likely to be influenced to go into debt for more land to increase his efficiency and volume of business so as to secure a standard of living for himself and his children which he has not enjoyed in the past. This problem must be attacked at the time the young man secures title to the farm he is likely to operate for the rest of his days.

The young mother with proper knowledge of infant feeding can set up a diet to control the growth of the child; otherwise the child may start with a physical handicap that can not be overcome later in life.

In the above discussion attention has been called to isolated decisions or choices. But when these are all put together they make for a life plan or pattern. Most people have not consciously evolved a life plan but if they would stop and analyze why they act in a certain way under different situations they would realize they have a pattern or certain ideals toward which they are striving. All farm and home program planning is an effort to improve this pattern or picture.